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ABSTRACT

The University of South Carolina (USC) Child Abuse and Neglect Interdisciplinary Training Project provides students with the opportunity to gain advanced knowledge and skills for work with maltreated children and families through didactic courses, practica, and community placements. The project involves interdisciplinary collaboration between students and faculty from social work, psychology, nursing, education, criminal justice, public health, law, and medicine. A unique aspect of the USC project has been the development of an assessment clinic for providing comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluations of maltreated children and families. In this project the clinical psychology supervisor is part of the assessment team and assists directly in guiding the multidisciplinary process as needed. The supervisor also meets with the psychology students individually and as a group to provide direct teaching and supervision of psychology training. Students need a strong theoretical background in normal child development before they can understand maltreatment. Issues such as maltreatment require a multidisciplinary approach in university settings. By exposing bright and concerned graduate students early in their professional development to questions about how children cope with maltreatment, what treatment approaches help, what placement alternatives work best, and how to prevent future maltreatment, research and applied programs will be stimulated. (ABL)

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APA DIVISION 37 SYMPOSIUM:

Psychology's Role in Interdisciplinary Child Abuse Training
Through Graduate Education

The Role of the Clinical Supervisor in Empowering Students
To Work Effectively in Child Maltreatment

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Since the beginning of 1988 I have had the pleasure of being on the faculty of the USC Child Abuse and Neglect Interdisciplinary Training Project. I am the clinical supervisor of the psychology graduate students, a member of the interdisciplinary team, and a lecturer in the didactic courses. Being part of this project has been a continual challenge for me. It has been especially exciting to be part of a truly collaborative effort to develop an effective interdisciplinary model of training students to work in the area of child maltreatment in ways that have a positive impact on children, families, and the agencies that work with them. My goal in this presentation is to briefly introduce the USC model, to discuss the clinical supervisor's role in training psychology graduate students in an interdisciplinary model, and then to react to the questions of factors to consider in developing graduate training, promoting interdisciplinary training within universities, and implications for developing psychological knowledge and theory.

I. USC Child Abuse and Neglect Interdisciplinary Training Project

The USC Child Abuse and Neglect Interdisciplinary Training Project provides students with the opportunity to gain advanced knowledge and skills for work with maltreated children and families through didactic courses, practica, and community placements. The project involves interdisciplinary collaboration between students and faculty from social work, psychology, nursing, education, criminal justice, public health, law, and medicine. Didactic courses involve representatives of the different disciplines and present current theory and knowledge about maltreatment including definitions, concepts, effects, prevention, identification, assessment, treatment, and collaboration.

A unique aspect of the USC project has been the development of an assessment clinic for providing comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluations of maltreated children and families. Involvement in the assessment practicum provides an intense experience in applying principles from the didactic course and in learning to work on a multidisciplinary team. Students from different disciplines are part of a multidisciplinary team of students and faculty. They must learn to provide disciplinary assessments of complex child and family cases, work with representatives of numerous agencies, communicate information and perspectives to their team and to the family and agencies, and integrate their findings into a coordinated set of results and recommendations. The assessment clinic provides students with the opportunity to gain experience in working with complex maltreatment issues with the intense support and supervision of the multidisciplinary faculty and team.

Students in the practicum also choose to be involved in community placements where they may work with treatment of individuals or groups of maltreated children or families or with prevention, education, or support programs. A second practicum focuses on development of programs and policies related to child maltreatment and provides students with placement in state and local agencies where they are involved in interdisciplinary teams.

II. The Role of the Clinical Supervisor in Selection and Supervision

Being part of an interdisciplinary team requires a student to have already mastered the basics of professional identification, disciplinary theory and concepts, and skills. In order for students to have developed these basic skills, selection into the practica is restricted to third or fourth year doctoral students who have excelled in their psychology programs. Interest and

experience in working with children and families is desirable. Most important, however, is the motivation in students to immerse themselves in a new challenge, openness to new ideas, and excitement about growing as professionals.

Working with child maltreatment is extremely stressful for professionals and requires considerable personal maturity. Some students and professionals are motivated to work in the area because of their own personal experiences. As part of the selection process, we have learned that students must be aware of their own motivation and reactions and be able to cope with their own feelings if they are to deal effectively with others. Students who have experiences of maltreatment that are too painful for them to deal with are not yet ready to help others.

In our project, the clinical psychology supervisor is part of the assessment team and assists directly in guiding the multidisciplinary process as needed. The supervisor also meets with the psychology students individually and as a group to provide direct teaching and supervision of psychology training. Supervision is an intense experience as the supervisor works simultaneously on broadening the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of the students, improving their technical and professional skills, and helping them deal with their own emotional reactions to maltreatment.

At first, interdisciplinary team work may be quite difficult for psychology graduate students. They are trained to work independently and the interdisciplinary approach can be cumbersome. Generally, the psychology students are at a more advanced level of graduate training than other team members. The psychology students often have little experience explaining how they see things or what tools they use. The team may cast the psychologist in a role as the "tester" whose job it is to get an IQ score or "test" for emotional disturbance. On the other hand, the psychology student may see the role of others on the team as superfluous--they are used to functioning without a social work, nursing or educational assessment. As the team works together, they begin to value what they can learn from other members of the team and to see themselves as a coordinated whole. For example, in one case the psychologists were startled when the nursing assessment picked up a child's significant hearing loss that related to a number of cognitive and behavior problems that they had observed.

Initially, psychology graduate students tend to approach the issue of maltreatment from a unidimensional perspective. Most are trained in a perspective that emphasizes the development of pathology and from this view they are ready to see maltreatment as a child and family with a disease. They look for the good guys--usually the child victim or the passive parent, and the bad guys, usually the perpetrator. They see their role as helper as taking away the family's pain and making their lives better.

The role of the clinical supervisor in empowering the student often parallels the role of the student in working with families. In the first phase, the student naively looks for simple definitions of the problem and simple solutions that will fix the family. The supervisor works to broaden the student's perspectives. Supervision focuses on helping the student develop a more system-oriented, ecological view of the family. The student learns to try to see how the child and family view the world and what coping mechanisms they use to handle stress. At the same time supervision deals with how the student handles stress and their own coping mechanisms and how they affect their

approach to maltreatment.

In the second phase, the student often copes with feelings of powerlessness and distress at their inability to make the pain of the families disappear and to make the children "live happily ever after." At this stage supervision focuses on how to work with children and families in ways that acknowledge their pain and help them feel validated and empowered to cope with their pain and stress. The supervisor at the same time works to help the student grow and appreciate their own strengths and skills so that they can be flexible and family-oriented in their approach. Supervision helps the student feel strong enough to hear the pain of others and to feel the pain without being afraid of it or being responsible for it.

In the third phase, the students slowly begin to feel that they can have a positive impact on the lives of children, families and communities. They begin to recognize the importance of their own relationships with children, families and community agencies and how to relate in ways that make a difference. They learn to respect the individual styles and temperaments of those with whom they work and to hear what the individual needs to grow. Most importantly they begin to acknowledge the complexity of the issues and systems and to define the solutions in terms of small, manageable steps, supports, and contingencies. Supervision at this point becomes a support as students realize that they can figure out what they need to know on their own.

III. Issues in Interdisciplinary Training of Child Abuse and Neglect

A. Factors to consider in developing graduate curricula and practica to prepare psychologist for work with child maltreatment. A recurring need voiced by students in the USC project was their recognition of the importance of a strong theoretical foundation. Before students can understand maltreatment, they need to be able to integrate theories and knowledge about normal development, including family systems and ecology, cognitive, social and emotional development, coping with separation and loss, and attachment. Many psychology graduate programs provided limited training in human and family development which is essential for understanding maltreatment. In addition, experience in working with a range of young children is important in working in the maltreatment area and is frequently limited in psychology graduate programs.

B. Ways to promote interdisciplinary collaboration within universities. In most universities, there is little opportunity for students to interact across disciplines. Even within a psychology department, school and clinical students may rarely interact and there may be tension between mental health professionals in different departments like educational or counselling psychologists or psychiatric nurses or social workers. In most university departments, the curricula are already full with requirements and students have little free time for taking courses across disciplines. Yet clearly areas such as maltreatment are too complex to be owned by any one discipline and require a multidisciplinary approach. The students provide the best argument for the need for a multidisciplinary approach in their description of how much they learn and grow from the experience. With opportunity for interaction, students learn to see that there is often more shared ideas than they originally thought and that their differences often lead to a more enriched view.

Pragmatic issues often interfere with multidisciplinary training. At USC, practicum credits, requirements, and supervision are provided separately

through each department. This enables the student to fulfill departmental requirements and to be supervised by a faculty member from their department. Logistically this may be complicated with different students having different numbers of hours to spend on the project or different evaluation criteria. However, it enables the project faculty to individualize the program to fit the needs of students with different levels, backgrounds, and requirements.

C. Implications of interdisciplinary child abuse and neglect training for the development of new psychological knowledge and theory. Students often noted that working with maltreatment was very important to them in enriching their clinical work and research in other areas. Even for students who do not expect to specialize in work in maltreatment understanding maltreatment provides insight and skills that are helpful in many other areas. Students noted that their work on ITP made them better able to understand clients, to be more aware of clues to histories of maltreatment, and to be more effective in their work by integrating more perspectives.

Working in the area of maltreatment raises countless questions. We still know so little about how children cope with maltreatment, what treatment approaches help, what placement alternatives work best for which kinds of children, how best to support families and prevent future maltreatment, and how to prevent maltreatment and promote family functioning. By exposing bright and concerned graduate students to the questions early in their professional development we are sure to stimulate the research and applied programs that will help provide answers to these questions and add to our understanding of psychology.